

Maricopa Association of Governments
Legal Assistance Study Project Design
Draft May 29, 2008

The Legal Assistance Study is continued from the FY2008 Unified Planning Work Program to FY2009 as follows:

A study focusing on civil legal assistance for domestic violence survivors will be completed by June 2009 in order to collect more local data about the types of legal services available and the outcomes of domestic violence cases where legal assistance is accessed. Approval of the report through the MAG process will indicate the report offers compelling research and analysis of the issue.

It is proposed to further refine this activity as follows:

Describe the experience of domestic violence survivors staying in shelters within Maricopa County within the family court system. Identify what assistance makes their experience beneficial and what presents disadvantages to them. This activity will include an inventory of services, a clear explanation of the family court process and what can be done to ensure survivors are able to access all opportunities for assistance within the family court system. This will be accomplished by highlighting best practices of survivors successfully navigating the family court system, as well as recommendations for how to expand upon these best practices.

Elements of the study are outlined for the review and approval of the MAG Regional Domestic Violence Council.

Purpose

1. To describe the experience of domestic violence survivors in shelters within Maricopa County in the family court system and their access to assistance.
 - a. To highlight the factors that help survivors access legal assistance.
 - b. To make recommendations to improve access to legal assistance.

Outcome

Policy makers will have a better understanding of how domestic violence survivors in shelters located in Maricopa County can better access legal assistance and the outcomes associated with receiving assistance.

Target Population

1. Primary:
 - a. Domestic violence survivors in domestic violence shelters
 - b. Domestic violence survivors in homeless shelters
2. Secondary:
 - a. Professionals that provide legal assistance such as court advocates, custody evaluators and parenting mediators
 - b. Judges and attorneys

Main Research Question

How well do domestic violence survivors staying in shelters access legal assistance in the family court system?

Supporting Questions	Data for Answers
1. What is the scope of this issue? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Within shelters, how many clients have family court cases? How many do not have cases?• How many Family Court cases are handled each year in Maricopa County?• What percent of litigants are pro-per or self-represent?	a. The number of shelter residents with domestic violence histories who have had or currently have cases in family court b. The proportion of answer a in comparison to the number of shelter residents with histories of domestic violence c. The number of cases in family court d. The number of cases in which people self-represent.
2. What is the frequency and effect of having a lawyer or assistance versus not having it?	a. The percent or number of times a pro-per litigant faces a lawyered one as indicated by court records. b. The number of times fathers are represented by lawyers versus mothers as indicated by court records. c. The number of times a lawyered litigant wins over a person who self-represents or a pro-per as indicated by court records. d. The percent or number of times judges follow evaluators' recommendations concerning custody, etc. as indicated by surveys to judges.
3. What elements make legal assistance in family court accessible to shelter residents with domestic violence histories?	a. Surveys and interviews with shelter residents with domestic violence histories b. Surveys and interviews with professionals
4. What elements make legal assistance in family court inaccessible to shelter residents with domestic violence histories?	a. Surveys and interviews with shelter residents with domestic violence histories b. Surveys and interviews with professionals
5. To what extent are these elements present currently in family courts?	Surveys and interviews with professionals

Areas of Legal Assistance

1. Divorce
2. Child custody
3. Child support
4. Orders of Protection

Potential Barriers to Assistance

1. Language
2. Income
3. Availability of legal assistance services (through courts or nonprofits)
4. Transportation
5. Beliefs of court professionals

Literature Review

1. Needs of domestic violence survivors for legal assistance and how they might be different from the general public
2. Best practices of providing legal assistance to survivors
3. Effects of receiving services or not receiving legal assistance
4. Volume of cases

Study Instruments

1. Survivor surveys
2. Surveys for professionals offering legal assistance
3. Interviews with survivors and professionals

Timeline and Tasks

What	When	Who
Design Approval		
Revise and approve project design	June 5 th	DV Council
Data Collection		
Initial meeting to draft survey and interview questions	June 12, 2008 2:00-3:30 pm, Cholla Room	Stakeholders group
Review study questions and survey instrument	June	Local experts, MAG staff and intern
Finalize and format the survey		
Distribute the survey (due back July 11 th)		
Schedule and facilitate interviews	July	MAG staff and intern
Data Entry and Analysis		
Enter data from surveys, and interviews	August	MAG staff, intern and stakeholders group
Analyze the data and draft findings		
Review and revise the findings		
Report Development and Approval		
Draft the report	September	MAG staff and intern

Review and revise the report	September	Stakeholders group
Present report for review and possible action	October 2 nd	DV Council
Approve the report (if needed)	December 3 rd	MAG Regional Council
Distribute the report	December	MAG staff and partners

Outstanding Needs

Access to NVivo software to code the qualitative data from the interviews

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